

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

**March 20, 2003
MEETING NO. 03-03**

APPLICATION: HDC03-0234

DATE FILED: February 24, 2003

**APPLICANT/
OWNER:** James Vitol
11 Wall Street
Rockville, MD 20850



Subject

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:

The Wire-Vitol House at 11 Wall Street was built in 1933 by local builder Frank Johnson. The basic design for the 1 ½ -story brick and frame modern Tudor-style cottage was taken from Sears, Roebuck and Company plans.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS:

HD-17-76 Removal of rear porch and steps; addition of family room and deck, approved 6/22/76.
HDC97-0097 Replacement of slate roof with an asphalt shingle roof, approved 4/15/97.

REQUEST: The Applicants request a Certificate of Approval to:

1. Install a 3' x 3' concrete pad and an air conditioning compressor on the north side of the house
2. Remove a leaning Magnolia tree on the north side of the house, and
3. Remove a dogwood in front of the house and replace it with a small ornamental tree.

11 Wall Street



1. Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.

The house at 11 Wall Street is a contributing resource to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. It is an example of the popular period architectural designs of the 1930s. It is constructed of brick with compact massing and stone detailing. Stone tabs in imitation of quoining frame a recessed entry. Other architectural details include overlapping steeply pitched high gable roofs, slightly flared eaves, and granite window sills. The steep pitch and slope of the dominant entry gable are features consistent with the Tudor cottage appearance.

2. The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.

According to Technical Brief #10, "Guidelines for Historic Property Owners – Utilities/Code Compliance", adopted by the Rockville Historic District Commission, air conditioner units, heat pumps, and utility boxes should be placed to the rear of properties or properly screened with acceptable material.

The pad and air conditioner unit are proposed to be located on the north side of the house, potentially visible from the right-of-way. From an aesthetic standpoint, it would be preferable if the unit could be placed to the rear (west) side of the house to be less obtrusive. However, it would occupy valuable privacy space and pose more of a noise nuisance in the rear. Therefore, if the unit is located on the north side of the house, as proposed, it should be screened with appropriate and attractive landscaping, especially since the magnolia tree in this vicinity is to be removed as part of the application.

Although both trees proposed for removal in this application are alive and pose no immediate hazard, the City Forester agrees with the owner that they should be removed. The magnolia is not a good specimen and has been poorly pruned. It was planted too close to the house (within four feet) and consequently is leaning away in search of light. It is located in the immediate vicinity of the proposed air conditioner unit and pad. As it continues to grow, it will create more problems and a potential threat to the house. The magnolia should be replaced with dense screening if this location is approved by the HDC for the air conditioner unit.

The dogwood is alive but it is also a poor specimen and has been poorly pruned. The City Forester recommends its removal and replacement with another dogwood or similar ornamental tree.

3. The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used

Central air conditioning is a modern convenience which increases the comfort and value of a residence, but the exterior equipment introduces a potentially obtrusive element and should be located to the rear of the property or at least well screened from public view.



Location of magnolia and proposed air conditioner unit and pad



Dogwood proposed for removal and replacement

4. To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the HDC approve HDC03-0234 and permit installation of the concrete pad and air conditioning compressor and removal of two trees with the following conditions:

1. A rear location for the air conditioner unit and pad is considered preferable to the more visible side location. However, staff understands that the side location would be preferable to the owners as it does not detract from use of the private rear yard. A side location requires adequate screening to minimize its visual impact.
2. The dogwood should be replaced with a similar ornamental tree and the magnolia should be replaced with appropriate screening material in the vicinity of the air conditioner unit/pad.